Does pre-season matter? It must to the St. Louis Blues.

Playing in seven of their eight pre-season games, the Blues have recorded a fabulous 5-2-0 record while out-scoring their opponents 19-14 in the process.

What do the wins accumulate to? Well, nothing really. The points to concern yourself with is how these wins are coming along and which players are the biggest factors in the games.

First of all, the goaltending is getting it done.

Since the NHL decided to throw a crazy pre-season schedule at the Blues (first 5 pre-season games were played in as many days; 8 total pre-season games in 12 days), Head Coach Davis Payne has elected to let every goaltender play an entire game, as opposed to the traditional pre-season method of letting two goalies split each game.

Currently, newcomer Brian Elliott is leading the way, playing in 2 games and posting a 1-1-0 record with a .917 save percentage. Ben Bishop has recorded a 2-0-0 record with a .907 save percentage while undisputed starting goalie Jaroslav Halak has posted a 1-1-0 record and a .892 save percentage. Youngster Jake Allen also saw a start against the Avalanche before being sent to Peoria.
He earned the victory, making 23 of 25 saves for a .920 save percentage.

Of course, goaltenders have to count on the players in front of them to let them see the puck and clear away any rebounds that just may pop out. Since the road games are not televised, the only way of seeing this is going to the games at Scottrade Center.
It has been very apparent that the Blues' defense is doing their jobs thus far.

The most impressive aspects of the games have been the players that have jumped out of the gate and really worked hard to keep a position on the roster.

Matt D'Agostini, who signed a 2-year extension to stay in St. Louis this summer, has had quite an impressive showing at Scottrade Center. He scored a sniper's goal in the pre-season opener against Tampa Bay, when the puck squirted out of in front of the net and found its way to D'Agostini's stick. He found daylight above Lightning goaltender Jaroslav Janus' glove and rang it under the crossbar for the game-winning goal. Since then, D'Agostini has added another goal to his pre-season totals.
He is among the Blues' shooting leaders, blasting 10 shots in 3 games toward opposing goaltenders.

Evgeny Grachev, acquired in the 2011 NHL Entry Draft from the New York Rangers in exchange for a third-round pick, has made quite the case to remain a Blue for the season opener on October 8. Grachev leads the Blues with 3 goals and is tied for the team-lead in points with 5. He has probably been the biggest surprise for the Blues, knocking in pucks off rebounds and keeping plays alive while battling for pucks in the corners. Grachev uses his big frame to his advantage (6'4" 224 lbs), as he has continuously outworked players for loose pucks.
Grachev likely sees David Perron's absence as an opportunity to step in for the start of the season and pound some pucks to the back of the net.

The best sign for the new season probably came Thursday night, when the Blues hosted the Colorado Avalanche. With the roster down to 29 players (23 is the maximum NHL roster size), the Blues sent out a lineup that could very well be what we see on October 8.
While the Blues dominated the play most of the evening, especially the 2nd period when the Blues out-shot the Avalanche 16-4, one forward line stole the show.

The line of T.J. Oshie – Patrik Berglund – Chris Stewart seemed almost unstoppable throughout the evening. The Avalanche, who played the night before in Colorado, just could not stop the Blues' top line. Oshie, Berglund and Stewart racked up seven shots on the evening along with goals from Oshie and Berglund. The line was

also used as on the power-play with Oshie shifting back to the point with Alex Pietrangelo and Andy McDonald filling the void up front.
When this line was on the ice, it was difficult for the Avalanche to clear it out of the zone.

The penalty-kill has been impressive as well. The regulars have been utilized a lot, which includes defensemen Alex Pietrangelo, Barret Jackman and Carlo Colaiacovo, along with forwards Vladimir Sobotka, Phillip McRae, B.J. Crombeen, Scott Nichol and Alex Steen.
The Blues are 27-33 on the PK, giving them an 81.8%.

The Blues' last pre-season game will be this Saturday when they host the Dallas Stars at 1:30 pm. FANfest will be prior to the game with festivities beginning at 9:30 am.

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